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## A word of the superior general

## Betharramite formation in the age of interculturality

*“When this noise was heard, the crowd gathered and was filled with astonishment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. With great admiration and amazement they said: “Aren’t these men who speak all Galileans?” How is it that each of us hears them in his own language?”*  
(Acts 2. 6-8)

Dear Betharramites:

Religious life is acquiring an increasingly intercultural face. Our Betharramite face also becomes polychromatic. Communities are diversifying and giving space to what in the past could be considered by some as “foreign or peripheral.” It is a general phenomenon in the Church, which calls for a profound change of mentality inspired always by the gospel.

This diversity is also manifested in vocational matters. The laity, with a growing synodal participation, are the true animators of life in many of our works.

This intercultural interaction between religious people, together with lay people, is like a driving force of Betharram today and represents a great challenge for the formation of future Betharramites.

From here I will focus on some ideas so that we can reflect together on the formation of the religious and lay people of Betharram in times of interculturality.

In a global society, the encounter between people from different cultures is frequent and occurs in the most diverse situations. It is about observing and respecting others, trying not to invade their space. It is like a basic exercise in tolerance that we call "coexistence." But this is not enough when it comes to daily contact between *people from different cultures in a religious community*, because we also have to participate *in the same life project that involves working together and living in the same house*. This is a call to modify the horizons that define our "being together", no longer to concern ourselves with *saving our own autonomy*, but to *participate in a common path* in which we are all invited to "change" and a path on which we do not know if we can guarantee success...

To think that this "sharing of life" is going to happen *spontaneously* is naive. Perhaps some of us have not understood how much cultural differences affect the depths of each brother's being.

When we talk about *cultural differences*, some simple things come to mind: food, schedules, the way others dress and speak, etc. But there are differences at a deeper level: e.g. the fundamental experiences of life as a family, the sense of duty, the relationship with authority; how illness, mourning, and belonging to a community are experienced. Learning to dialogue about all this is vital. It requires time dedicated to listening, reciprocal patience and a generous willingness to want to learn from each other. There are even other deeper existential aspects such as: what is life? How do we understand the sacred? and our relationship with them. There are times when brothers carry myths from their culture that have influenced the forming of their basic values. From these questions it surfaces that, in the understanding of the self, "the freedom of the individual" is more important for some, while for others, life turns on "being members of a community" from which life was received and without which life would not have any sense.

Life in common, sharing prayer and certain moments of encounter are not enough for an integration of the deepest strata. It happens to some Betharramites in formation that they acquire much knowledge *intellectually*, but they do not translate it into their own lives. The result is that the person's identity is built in watertight compartments. When crises or unexpected situations arrive, one's deep feelings resurface, but in an inconsistent way.

Since formation never ends, we cannot assume that the solution is for *younger religious to change their mentality* while 'golden oldies' who already have many miles on the clock do not need to change...

We have to overcome prejudices and live in a style of greater reciprocity. We are often not aware of how many cultural prejudices we have and how much they influence the way we think, feel and value each other. I think that in the Betharram of the third millennium we would have to rewrite a new history without a sense of "us" and "them". It is important that we all have spaces to listen to each other, understand and make ourselves understood - without anyone being offended - regarding the assumptions that underlie our attitudes towards *culturally different* people. All of this should lead us to a constructive dialogue and to practice reciprocity more clearly, that is, the ability to give but also to receive, to let ourselves be cared for.

In fraternal life we share what we are and have, including our spiritual sensitivity, often linked to our individual history, childhood, culture of origin. Although the congregation was born at a time, in a specific country or region, it does not mean that other cultures should be considered inferior or deficient. On the contrary, it is necessary for each person to have a positive appreciation of their own culture of origin, that allows them to see how they can contribute to internalising and living the Gospel. It is about *inculturation*, about walking together, rethinking the charism, preserving its essence, but being willing to free it from the forms that have "shaped" or "fixed" it to the particular culture of a country or a specific historical moment.

There is no doubt that formation in interculturality will open us to unprecedented experiences that raise resistance and fears within us. On the other hand, intercultural communities tend to be very stimulating because they allow their members - thanks to their

diversity - to learn from each other. But this will be possible *if they are regularly accompanied by competent formators*. Let us prepare for it.

Formation for interculturality will surely modify our institutional structures in the coming years, it will even give a new face to our religious family. And that gives *hope* to those who feel like a *pilgrim*.

Because Jesus Christ is going forward, so: "*Non preire, sed sequi*" (*not to go ahead, but to follow him*), Saint Michael Garicoits told us.

**Fr. Gustavo Agín scj**

Superior General

*Questions to share:*

- 1. What things resonated with you most about this article? What chimed? What jarred?*
- 2. What do you feel about the reality of "intercultural Betharram"?*
- 3. Do you think that the progressive integration of Betharramites from other cultures into your vicariate is being successful so far? Why? Or, what is missing for it to be so?*

## Address to the community of the archepiscopal seminary of Naples, Clementine Hall, Friday, 16 February 2024



[...] The Church is first and foremost a building site whose work is always ongoing. That is, she is always on the move, open to the novelty of the Spirit, defeating the temptation to preserve herself and her own interests. The principal task of the “Church site” is to journey in the company of the Risen Crucified One, bringing the beauty of His Gospel to men and women.

This is essential. It is what the synodal path is teaching us; it is what listening to the Spirit and the men of our time asks of us, without compromise; but it is also what is required of us: to be servants – this means ministers – who know how to adopt a style of pastoral discernment in every situation, knowing that all of us, priests and laity, are on the path towards fullness, and that we are all workers on a building site. We cannot offer monolithic, preconceived answers to today’s complex reality, but we must invest our energies by proclaiming the essential, which is God’s mercy, and manifesting it through closeness, paternity, meekness, refining the art of discernment.

For this reason, the journey of formation for the priesthood is a worksite. We must never make the mistake of feeling that we have already arrived, of considering ourselves ready to face challenges. Priestly formation is a worksite in which each one of you

is called to put himself at stake in truth, to let God build up His work over the course of the years.

Therefore, do not be afraid to let the Lord act in your life; as on a worksite, the Spirit will come first to demolish those aspects, those convictions, that style and even those incoherent ideas about faith and the ministry that will prevent you from growing according to the Gospel; then the same Spirit, after having swept away the inner falsehoods, will give you a new heart, build up your life in accordance with Jesus’ style, and make you become new creatures and missionary disciples. He will mature your enthusiasm through the cross, as it was for the Apostles. But do not be afraid of this: it can certainly be tiring work, but if you remain docile and true, disposed to the action of the Spirit without stiffening and defending yourselves, you will discover the Lord’s tenderness within your fragilities and in the pure joy of service. In this building site of your formation, dig deep, “practising the truth” within you with sincerity, cultivating the inner life, meditating on the Word, exploring in study the questions of our time and the theological and pastoral issues. And permit me to recommend something: work on emotional and human maturity. Without this, you will go nowhere! [...] ■



## Forming in times of interculturality... for a renewed formation



### Meeting of the Betharramite Formation Team in Rome

| Fr. Stervin Selvadass scj

The Betharramite Formation Team was together from 29th January – 03rd February 2024 under the leadership of Rev. Fr. Gustavo Agin, (Superior General), Rev. Fr. Jean Do (Vicar General), Fathers: Gaspar Fernandez, Osmar Spaini and Luke Kiriangsak – who were present in Rome and Fathers: Jean Paul Kissi, Simone and Stervin Selvadass – who participated via zoom. Since its formation, the Betharramite Formation Team has always given a great support to the Superior General in developing a skilled work for the whole congregation. Let me narrate to you the synthesis of the meeting.

First and foremost, we begun

to share about the realities of our formation houses in our congregation. As we shared about the daily life of our formation houses, we thanked God for the 140 youth present in our various formation houses. It is so true that new vocations for Betharram are always a blessing as St. Michael Garicoits said, “Vocation can only come from God” (DS. 278). We appreciate sincerely and value dearly the mission of the formators and vocation animators in our congregation.

Secondly, it was a moment to re-talk about the richness of our charism, the depth of our spirituality and how we impart them especially to the young in the initial formation.



It is here we re-read the hard-work and the lived experiences of our fathers and brothers who drafted the formation guide and we acknowledged the support of the Betharramite Formation Team which formulated the orientations, directives and guidelines. They are a great support to our initial formation. There are formators who have taken on board seriously and passionately these supports but at the same time there is a search for a pedagogy<sup>1</sup> – a Betharramite discipline – Betharramite culture in all our formation houses throughout the congregation in order to *“build up the lives of youngsters in accordance with Jesus’s style and make them new creatures and missionary disciples”*<sup>2</sup>. There was lot of emphasis on helping the

formee to ‘Know / discover /open up oneself’. It was insisted by Pope Francis to the community of Seminary too, “we must work on emotional and human maturity. Without this, we will go nowhere”<sup>3</sup>. Yes, formators have a greater role in order to help the young to know themselves personally better particularly during their postulancy of their initial formation. It is in knowing oneself better and better, one can enter into the fuller knowledge of Christ and His mission.

The congregation always prepares the formators. These formators are qualified by various learnings and experiences. Each formator involves himself in the mission of formation according to his learning and living experience. As the Congregation continues *“to thank the Lord for the young religious who have agreed to form themselves to become formators and who take up the*

1) Cf. next page the article of Fr. Gaspar scj.

2) Address of his Holiness Pope Francis, to the community of the archepiscopal seminary of Naples, on friday, 16 february 2024.

3) *Ibidem.*

service with joy" (Acts of the 27<sup>th</sup> GC, 86); it desires to unify them in order to define what is the Betharramite Style of Formation. To work on this research for a pedagogy – a Betharramite style of formation, we planned on a formators meet of the congregation in Betharram in the beginning of July 2024 as it was indeed desired by the General Chapter 2023 in Thailand (Acts of the 27<sup>th</sup> GC, 87). There were also many other aspects of our formation houses talked about. May this process which entails new adventures and new challenges, new questions and new responses open us to the novelty of the spirit in these years to become the formators of Hope.

Thirdly, we evaluated the previous international session at Betharram in France for brothers in preparation for/around final vows. Then, we meticulously planned for the international session 2024 taking into consideration the synodal path in line with theme of the General Chapter "Be opened (listening), Get up (sharing) and Walk Together (renewed in our conviction to go forward)".

Finally, I greatly appreciate the climate of fraternal listening, sincere sharing and brotherly encouragement to go forward in our service. Once again, a sincere gratitude to all in the mission of formation and vocation animation. ■



## The pedagogy of Betharramite formation

| Fr. Gaspar Fernández Pérez scj

Our *Formation Guide (Ratio Formationis)* is not a reflection on formation for Consecrated life, but a Project, a path, an educational, operational itinerary, to be implemented in each formation house, and which takes into account all the dimensions of the person and which prioritises the formative dialogue between the young person in formation and his teacher.

*"The central objective of the formation process is the preparation of the person for the total consecration of himself to God in the following of Christ, in the service of mission..."*

*Since the object of consecrated life consists of conformation with the Lord Jesus and with his total sacrifice [166], formation must be oriented above all to this. It is an itinerary of progressive assimilation of the feelings of Christ*



towards the Father" (VC. 65).

**"The method to prepare for it must contain and express the characteristic of a total role. It must be the formation of the whole person [167], in every aspect of his person, intentions and external gestures. Precisely for this reason, the need for formation never ends. In fact, it is necessary that consecrated persons be provided to the end with the opportunity to grow in adherence to the charism and mission of the Institute itself."** (VC 65) <sup>1</sup>

This objective requires of the young person in formation certain indispensable dispositions: to freely and responsibly accept the commitment required by the possibility of seriously responding to his vocation. We can summarize the responsible freedom of the young person in formation like this: *"The person in formation is invited to: an openness of trust with the spiritual companion and the formators,*

1) Cf. Ratio formationis, nr. 40-48.

*accepting with faith the human mediations desired by God; a free and responsible response to internalise the values of consecrated life; "the generous following of the formation process".*<sup>2</sup>

But the young person in formation cannot achieve such a sublime objective on his own; he needs the accompaniment of the formator, who is a religious, and who has achieved that objective, following that method. This close accompaniment of the formator to the young person in formation has its roots in, and has been perfected in the tradition of the church, in what is called spiritual fatherhood.

Both *Vita Consecrata* and our *Formation Guide* envisage a Formator who is respectful of the freedom of the young person, observant of his behaviour, but also is a companion in his activity. He trusts in grace, has an attitude of listening, and points out obstacles and deceptions to

2) Ratio Formationis, nr. 128.



the young person, (sometimes not evident) into which he can fall. He proposes resources of wise, human and even psychological experience that can help him in discernment and in the maturation of the new man, the image of Christ<sup>3</sup>. He also shows him the beauty of following Christ and the value of the charism. He challenges the young person in formation with elements, methods and experiences that, accepted by the young person, allow him to bring out all the good that he has within him, and put it at the Service of God, and collaborate in the mission of Christ and serve his brothers. This requires on the part of the young person in formation a trust in the formator and in the resources that he makes available to him to achieve what is proposed. The formator has to be appropriately patient and demanding with the young person, being attentive to the situation in which he finds himself. If he comes to see clearly that the young man does not show signs of a vocation, he has the obligation to indicate to the young man that this is not his path<sup>4</sup>. All this interpersonal communication between the young person in training and his teacher is carried out in "**the personal conversation, which must be held regularly and with a certain frequency, and which constitutes a practice of proven and irreplaceable**

3) Cf. VC nr. 66.

4) The gift of priestly vocation, *Ratio Formationis*, nr. 197

effectiveness."<sup>5</sup>

The core of our formation project that all formators, according to their stage, have to take more care of is what the Formations Ratio calls "living the triple experience of theological life."<sup>6</sup>

1. The young person must be helped, and providing with tools, **in getting to know himself**<sup>7</sup>. So that he can integrate into the unity of his personal life both the weaknesses and the strengths that are in him, because "only *all* life, existence in its entirety, speaks of God in his loving totality, as Father, Son and Spirit."<sup>8</sup>
2. The young person must be helped too, with the right tools, **in the intimate knowledge of the Lord, my God, revealed in Christ**<sup>9</sup>. The person of Jesus is proposed in our Betharramite pedagogy with the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises.
3. The young person must be helped, with the appropriate tools, to learn to recognize, through **the exercise of discernment**, all the good received from God in daily life as a disciple-missionary, who lives the life of Jesus and collaborates in his mission.

5) Cf. VC, nr. 66 and *Ratio Formationis*, nr. 71

6) *Ratio Formationis*, nr. 61: "The formator should watch over the formation programme of each young person making sure that he has the threefold experience of theological life, without which all the other activities connected with formation are superficial."

7) Cf. *Ratio Formationis*, nr. 62

8) The tree of life, *Amedeo Cencini*, p. 2 of the notes.

9) Cf. *Ratio Formationis*

The young person who, during the long formation itinerary, has lived these three experiences intensely, accompanied by his teacher, is in a position to make the total offering of his life (perpetual vows) to live the gospel in the community and the mission that the congregation entrusts to him, because he has achieved the transformation of his person, and has assimilated the feelings of Christ towards the Father and has a human and spiritual maturity. The formative process aims to form a missionary-disciple dedicated to "love and serve" God and men in everything.

Hence, what has been achieved with so much effort in the long formative process must be protected and cared for in ongoing formation, in ordinary life, with the means that the religious has at his disposal. This is what Saint Paul said to Timothy: *"Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophetic intervention with the laying on of hands of the presbytery"* (I Tim 4, 14).

Sometimes we see the young perpetually professed, or the recently ordained, and even some older religious without a sense of identity and belonging to the body of the Congregation, acting with a particular lifestyle, which has nothing to do with the style of the Congregation or consecrated life. How can it happen that an experience, as profound as our Ratio proposes to young people in formation, evaporates so quickly? Could there be other factors at work that cause events that hurt us so much?

For a long time now the Congregation has been very interested in formation, with the Betharramite Formation Service, the unification of formation centres, the forming of formators, the meetings of formators. All these actions prepare us to commit ourselves much more to a higher quality formation of our religious for the good of the Church and the Congregation. ■



## Formation in changing times

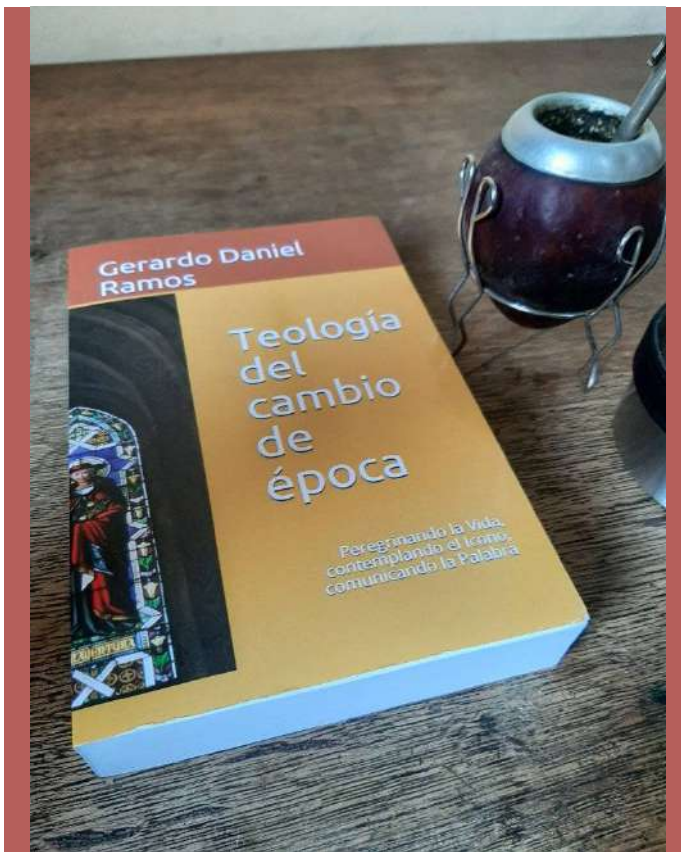
| Fr. Gerardo Ramos scj

This change of era invites us to seriously consider the challenge of moving from a formation of "reproductive osmosis" to an intentional and creative "free

ownership" of Christian values.

### 1. A crisis of lost bearings

This change of era has questioned,



(among other things), our Christian tradition understood as a safe frame of reference to which we relate and on which we confidently rely, almost without thinking. But if we do not manage to transcend the old outdated 'maps of the past' and draw on the amazing vitality behind the new changing exterior forms, our religious consecration will be reduced, at best, to a story in a heritage centre.

## 2. A new theological GPS

The GPS that guides us on the "immense ocean of the Third Millennium" (John Paul II), our Christian pilgrimage through the terra incognita of digital culture commanded by AI, must be: (i) a mystical faith that is "obscure but

sure" (like St. John of the Cross), (ii) a faith that makes us capable of "seeing God in all things" (like St. Ignatius Loyola), and (iii) a faith that recognises God in the marginalised and dispossessed (like St. Francis of Assisi). Any other type of reference on our path that claims to be objective and safe will become, in the short or long term, idolatrous.

## 3. A thoughtful itinerary

We need to plan thoughtful itineraries at all levels... human and spiritual ....intellectual and pastoral .... and not just repeat old slogans like: 'it is what it is' or 'we've always done it this way'. Convinced that the Son of God became flesh and lived among us, and aware that the world is the temple of God and that we are children of God in the Son, we see our mission as to help our fellow men and women become aware of this and translate it into radical lifestyles, with energy and meaning according to their own culture. Quite a tall order!

## 4. Radical virtues

So it is essential in the formation process to awaken and develop helpful human and Christian virtues: impartial listening, humble obedience, active discernment plus generous and creative service, and a resistance to attack, born of faith in the resurrection. God challenges us both in daily life and in great events, that

take us out of our comfort zone. He invites us to discernment that sets us on a path with “new methods, ardour and expressions” (John Paul II). These will only mature and bear succulent fruits if there is an honest review of life (e.g., Ignatian examination) and patient perseverance in their exercise.

## **5. Know how to act, and know how to live**

The purpose of formation is to acquire theological wisdom, of a practical and real-time nature, intuitive and reflective, integral and dynamic, which ever nourishes a missionary discipleship in development and growth. It opens us more and more to God, who shows himself both in the daily vicissitudes of life (personal, community, pastoral and ecclesial), and in the culture of our time, and helps us to love from the Heart of Jesus (animated by the Ruach) as He would love in our place. It is true that we cannot do everything, but whatever we do, let us do it well.

## **6. Mystery, fraternity and service**

Having ongoing formation as the general paradigm of this path, and initial formation as the privileged time of greater intensity, what has been said above should be expressed particularly in three vital areas: (i) in the way we experience and open ourselves to the God of Life in the

mystical daily grind, and seek to respond to what is presented to us; (ii) in the way we connect with others in and beyond the community, where there are diverse people with varied idiosyncrasies and lifestyles, and (iii) in the fruitful creativity with which we develop our timely pastoral service, according to our gifts and charismas, personal or associated.

## **7. Transfigured Radiance**

Formation programmes should stimulate the sustainable development of Christian life, of missionary discipleship in germ since our baptism, so that it blossoms in an eloquent holiness of life. It should promote a unified and meaningful existence, motivating and enthusiastic, that generates bonds and develops life, in which our charism is not just in the sayings of authority but in a committed and luminous life experience, which radiates from the inside out. This should be the number one requirement expected of those who accompany processes that awaken and promote this consistent path to holiness. ■



## Interculturality in Formation for the Saint Michael Garicoïts Region

| Fr. Jean-Paul Kissi Ayo scj

**In the Saint Michel Garicoïts region, we experience the reality of interculturality in our formation houses on a daily basis.**

The largest community that brings this diversity together is the Adiapodoumé formation house. In addition to the presence of several stages of formation, namely the pre-novitiate, novitiate, and scholasticate, not forgetting the presence of priests and religious with perpetual vows in various missions; members of the community come from five nationalities (Ivorian, Central African, Beninese, Burkinabe, Rwandan).

I must also mention the formation houses in the Central African Republic, the pre-novitiate in Bimbo with three nationalities (Central African, Ivorian, and Italian), and the novitiate in Bouar also with three nationalities (Central African, Ivorian, and Italian).

This interculturality is also experienced in active communities where young people are sent for formation, mainly in Europe.

In our communities in Côte d'Ivoire and the Central African Republic, difficulties in integrating interculturality are present, but they are not very pronounced. The

advantage in these communities is that there is a closeness in cultures, similar realities, a way of being and living that are similar. A Central African has no trouble understanding an Ivorian, just as it is between Beninese, Burkinabe, Rwandans, Central Africans, and Ivorians. It is true that there are temptations of comparison to consider one culture better than another. This often happens when a brother judges his country to be more developed and advanced than the other, to the point of considering it as lagging behind the world's evolution or modernity.

Generally, this is not a serious problem among brothers. Acceptance of the other in their diversity is lived out well. In Côte d'Ivoire, for example, there are many local languages, around sixty-nine, and in the community, five, six, or more are represented; some from the north, others from the south, centre, west, or east. There is practically at least one representative from each cardinal point in the community. There are also two or three from the same place speaking the same language, or from the same country. Here too, there may be a temptation to defend one's region, to protect



*Formation community of Adiopodoumé last January, during the visit of the Regional Superior, Fr. Simone Panzeri, to the Vicariate of Côte d'Ivoire.*

oneself, or to cover each other for a good or less good reason; however, this reality is not so striking as to jeopardise the community climate or hinder the young person's formation path. Actually, cultural differences are not so great, and even when noticed, young people in formation agree to engage in a new approach. At the table or in community meetings, we prioritise the language understood by all. This does not prevent young people from speaking other languages at certain times to stay connected to their cultures. During community moments, we also exchange on certain realities of our cultures to better understand and accept each other.

The greatest difficulty arises

when young people in formation leave their original environment to integrate into our communities in the West or in communities with a slightly different culture from their own. In these environments, integration is not always easy and can vary depending on the young person's ability to integrate. The young person in formation, like some of the brothers who welcome them, may face cultural shocks that often lead to interpersonal relationship difficulties. There is also a temptation to attribute to culture a way of life that does not always promote living together. Efforts must be made in both directions for better integration, both in terms of those who welcome and those who are welcomed.

There are also difficulties when the host community demands more effort from young people in formation while struggling to provide it. For the experiences of our young people in formation sent outside their original vicariate, it should be noted that progress remains to be made in linguistic, dietary, relational, social, and many other aspects for

better integration and a successful mission. Interculturality is a wealth for our communities, and we must make good use of it. Today, it is appropriate to continue this path of intercultural integration in the face of the challenges of our societies and our world for more vibrant and fraternal communities. ■



## Experience of interculturality and integration in the house of formation

(Fr. Auguste Etchecopar's Region)

| Fr. Osmar Vicente Cáceres Spaini scj

### The spaces of intercultural integration that I had experienced:

I came into contact with the Congregation in 2001, and in 2002, I started my experience as an aspirant in the Community of San José of Ciudad del Este (Paraguay). In 2003, I entered in the formation community of Puente Remanso, Mariano Roque Alonso (Paraguay). During this period, I had the chance to live with other brothers from Brazil.

Father Mauro scj, a Brazilian, was my formator for two years. In 2006-2007, I had my novitiate at Adrogué. We lived in community with Paraguayans, Argentines and Brazilians and we had as master of novices Fr. Gustavo Agín scj.

From 2009, I lived for 4 years in the community of Belo Horizonte at the regional scholasticate in Brazil.

This is where I found the Argentinian and Brazilian brothers with whom I had already shared my novitiate experience, as well as Father Mauro who was then Master of the Scholastics. Furthermore, at the Institute of Theology where I studied, I had the opportunity to share with religious people from other Latin American countries.

In 2017, I was appointed master of novices. Since then, I live in Argentina in the community of the regional novitiate of Adrogué. Until now, I have accompanied Argentinians, Paraguayans and Brazilians. I am currently part of the formation team in the Region and I recently participated in the meeting of the Betharramite Formation Team in Rome.

### Difficulties encountered in the



## **integration process:**

During my own formation and the intercultural integration process, I encountered and experienced certain difficulties: often problems of understanding between brothers of various nationalities, either because we did not speak the same language, or because our customs were different or because we had prejudices with regards to one another. At the beginning, especially during the postulancy, I had lot of difficulty letting myself be accompanied by a new formator, from a reality other than mine, who neither spoke my language nor understood my native language. I have long been tempted to withdraw into myself, and overcome this situation was not without pain.

**Advantages:** Aside from the pain felt at staying away from my country for a long time, I notice that this intercultural integration bore fruit in me and in my brothers who had the opportunity to experience it. It helped me in particular to have a critical attitude towards my own culture and to assimilate what is good in other cultures. Mastery of the language and customs present in the Etchécopar Region made my task easier when I was asked to accompany young



*Fr. Osmar, novice master, with Fredy and Osvaldo, the two Paraguayan novices who, arrived at the house of formation of Adrogué on February 26, live a first stage of adaptation. April 7 will begin the canonical year.*

people in formation from the Vicariate of Brazil.

I also notice that, among the formators, we are getting better and better, capable of supporting young people in formation, regardless of the country in the Region from which origin they hail from, also better able to serve in an another Vicariate. In this year 2024, this reality has become clear: we have a Paraguayan Novice Master in Argentina, an Argentinian Master of Scholastics in Brazil, a Brazilian Regional Superior living in Argentina. This reality is also noticeable in a greater integration capacity at the regional level, when it comes to assume the mission. Today, several religious people live outside their country of origin and carry out the pastoral service. Thanks to this regional integration. I also see that the spaces of formation and the regional meetings encourage and enrich our exchanges.

**Challenges:** From my position as a formator, I feel challenged to continue to value and promote this integration experience. In the Region, our challenge is to prepare young people, from the first stage of their formation, to be open to a greater regional and inter-regional integration. Our regional team of formators will be

represented at the next meeting of formators that will be held at the beginning of July in Betharram. I think this space will be greater important for the exchanges, so that we can continue to find together the better means to respond to the formation challenges. ■



## The experience of interculturality and intercultural integration in the house of formation

| Fr. Luke Kriangsak Kitsakunwong scj

**First of all, I would like to thank God for calling me as a formator to follow more closely the Charism of St. Michael Garicoits our Founder as expressed in “Here I Am”. And “always go forward”**

**So, I would like to share my little experience in formation on the aspects of interculturality and intercultural integration in the house of formation.**

When I was as a seminarian, I had experience of almost 16 years in formation houses both in Thailand and in India. It was very good life journey to learn and to get to know others from different cultures; and in the same way the different cultures helped me to grow and to understand other people more.

And when I was appointed as scholastic master at Ban Garicoits

Sampran, I had the chance to accompany the young in the formation – Vietnamese brothers as well as Thai brothers. They came from different countries, languages, cultures and different Ethnic groups.

Though they all came from different cultural backgrounds (interculturality) they were able to live together in intercultural integration in the house of formation in the same spirit of our Congregation and the same Charism of St. Michael Garicoits.

Living together with our brothers in formation give me an experience of “feeling at home” as a brother. I took time to get to know each brother. I accompanied them and listened to them. There was a beautiful sharing among brothers, about their history of life and their vocational story. In this



*The Regional Superior of the Region of Saint Mary of Jesus Crucified, welcomed in the formation community of Sampran during his visit to the Vicariate of Thailand-Vietnam.*

way, we were reminded that it is Jesus Christ, who as the centre of our lives and our personal Saviour, invites us to the mission of Betharram formation.

So, from these little experiences I could say that "In each country, cultures, languages and so on, they have their own significance, richness and beauty of culture and lifestyle."

Through interculturality, I was given a more worldwide perspective, through the thoughts, and understanding of others, and I could see the beauty of each culture, making the world and society in which we live beautiful, meaningful and united in diversity and it helped me to learn more about others and lead me in many ways to be open to enter a new culture and social milieu.

### **What steps have been taken?**

The Integrative Approach to Intercultural Relations.

Intercultural integration in formation: we teach the principle of "Unity in Diversity" as well as "interculturality" to the young and help them know how they can live together with other brothers in understanding and in peace in the community.

In formation we accompany and teach the young "to love and to know more deeply their own culture, their own roots and their own life background. And then, we help them to learn and to grow by opening themselves to welcome the new culture of the place in which they find themselves, to see the richness therein with respect and understanding.

Through the Charism of "the Incarnation" (Cf. Ratio 215) we have to make efforts to incarnate our charism of Betharram in the culture where we are. On this point our young in the formation have to have a positive attitude, and respect and support the

spirit of Betharram in the community with a good heart and mind.

In formation we help them to be proud of their own cultural roots and to respect the cultural values of the other as well.

### What is missing?

Though we are living and learning about the reality of interculturality and we practice intercultural integration in our life in the formation, we still need more openness, understanding and sensitivity to the needs of humanity to live in solidarity.

Though we can live together in the same community, we still need to be more accepting of each other by listening with sincerity of heart and mind and to appreciate more the cultural values of one other.

### Finally

Now the task of the representatives of the formators of each region is to bring all this rich sharing, all these inspirations and challenges of the respective regions, to reach out to the young in the formation, to the formators, and to all the religious of Betharram, to continue to shed light on the mission of Betharramite formation.

We are grateful to God for this important task involving interculturality and intercultural integration in formation. We thank God for providing us with a "Beautiful Mission" experience; to learn from culture and society, a mission that has always sought freedom and equality among people, and continues to be a model of the search for the Kingdom of God. ■



## A lay person's experience of Betharramite formation

| Rita de Cássia Soares, Lay Betharramite from Passa Quatro (Minas Gerais, Brazil)

Etymologically, training (or formation) consists of educating and forming the character and personality of an individual, but when this concept is put into practice, the whole notion vastly exceeds this simple definition.

Experiencing the charism of Betharram entails following a learning

process while keeping one's gaze firmly on the gentle silent Presence which, with utmost consistency, builds up in one's daily life and is consolidated by real actions of solidarity with others. In other words, it is with and by LIFE that one is formed, in doing the Father's will in all circumstances, to the very ends of the earth.

Having said that, I would not wish to dismiss the importance of "formation" in the literal sense. On the contrary, the fact of gathering as part of a family in the ordinary meetings of our lay group, of sharing our own personal life journey, forms a solid basis on which to fully live out the love which, as we walk along life's path, opens the road before us.

I remember a session led by Fr Mauro scj which focussed on Love from the viewpoint of the Prophet Amos. It was a total immersion in the very essence of the "Here I Am" which enabled us to establish a secure connection with the thinking and feeling of our founding Father, St Michael.

As a lay person born and raised in Passa Quatro (Brazil), I could tell enough tales of about our formation to fill a book, because our story is intermingled with the story of the FVD group in our community.

However, I chose to share with family just three highlights of my formation which, by their example, have had an eternal lasting impact on my life journey.

**The first of these occurred** when Fr José Antonio scj died. He was an emblematic person with whom I had enjoyed sharing some experiences of life and whose struggle we were closely associated with. Upright, standing clothed in his alb in the church forecourt, Fr José Mirande scj, (the greatest Brazilian of French extraction whom I've ever had the

pleasure of knowing), was there to welcome us while we waited for the funeral rites to commence. Seeing my dismay at such a loss, he came up to me and engulfed me in such a bear hug that I could hear nothing but the beating of his heart, and little by little, I understood that death is not the end but the beginning of true life! We never spoke about this afterwards but every time I was seized by unbearable anxiety I would message him: please, send me a silent hug, which he did willingly in the form of a prayer.

**The second special time** was while my mother was gravely ill and walking her own way of the Cross. Somewhat surprised by my frequent failures to make it to Mass, Fr Luiz Henrique scj offered to take my place at my mother's side and keep her company. And so I was able to come and be nourished and gain the strength necessary to walk that way of the Cross, with all the dignity and strength that comes from above. In this way I was able to see suffering as a blessing designed to help us grow in faith and make us better, more loving human beings when faced with the frailties inherent in life. "The path is a hard one, without any doubt! All the more reason not to turn in on oneself but to employ the immensity of charity with determination and resolution." (St Michael)

**The third experience** during formation took place in our Mother House, when Fr Sebastião scj was very ill following his stroke. We could not

judge the extent of the brain damage he'd suffered or his physical integrity. Fr Sebastião was a man of few words but of great wisdom and a heart that knew no limits to its love. Indeed, he was in turn most well-loved and a reference point for our little local community of Lay Betharramites.

We wasted no time getting a rota mobilised to care for him during his rehabilitation process. I was tasked with keeping him company in the afternoons. I often wonder why I was singled out from so many others to receive such grace. "My God, how much you have loved me! O God! What have you not done to make me love you!" (St Michael)

I realised that the faith of this priest did not appear to have been rocked at all. He remained serene and steadfast. I never heard him complain! On the contrary, he devoted the whole of his time to teaching me to the very highest standards of Betharramite learning, its ministry and the catechism of the Church, confession and to telling entertaining stories from his life. It was a wonderful apprenticeship which I could not have ever imagined being able to experience. There was I thinking I was helping him, but actually it was me who was the one being helped and transformed by the experience. I understood that trust in God cannot be based solely on positive occurrences and experiences. I saw that in frailty and pain also, the servant must remain faithful and fix his gaze on the One who created him

and supports him.

At present I am practising as a child psychologist in an institute which takes in special needs children, located next door to the College São Miguel. Whenever I encounter a difficult moment, one in which I feel threatened, I take refuge in the fathers' house and go into the chapel to pray; or I seek quietness and solitude by the pond near the college and meditate. In these fruitful moments I encounter the almost palpable presence of those who have been here before and who have left traces of a formation that has been accomplished via their witness and testimony of life. In my heart, I can hear the master saying: "God has his purposes and in secret, prepares mankind to carry them out". (St Michael).

Faced with the mystique surrounding this earth which I consider to be holy, an infinite peace which surpasses all human understanding takes care of my being. With a smile on my lips, I respond: "Here I am Lord, I come to do your will, to live in your love!" (St Michael).

I am reinvigorated, ready to face the world's pitfalls, without fear, without delay, meeting life as it comes, in the blind certainty that "When you walk with God, even as the darkness grows more obscure, you can see more clearly!" (St Michael). ■

## •\• Notices from the general council •/\•

During the General Council gathered on 26-27 February, **the Superior General with his Council approved the following appointments of Community Superiors:**

**Region St Michael Garicoits :** Fr. Angelo Riva / Community of Colico ; Fr. Piero Trameri / Community of Albavilla ; Fr. Maurizio Vismara / Community of Pistoia ; Fr. Enrico Frigerio / Community of Albiate ; Fr. Albino De Giobbi / Community of Ponte a Elsa ; Fr. Ercole Ceriani /Community of Rome *N.S. Miracoli*; Fr. Aldo Nespoli / Community of Sissa Trecasali ; Fr. Armel Daly Vabié / Community of Adiapodoumé ; Fr. Théophile Degni N'Guessan / Community of Monteporzio ; Fr. Hervé Kouamé Kouakou / Community of Pau ;

**Region Fr. Auguste Etchecopar :** Fr. Javier Irala / Community of Ciudad del Este ;

**Region Saint Mary of Jesus Crucified:** Fr. Thomas Hiran Klinbuakew / Community of Chiang Mai-Huay Tong ; Fr. Pascal Ravi / Community of Hojai ; Fr. Peter Nonthaphat Mayoe /Community of Sampran ; Br. Andrew Ferris / Community of Nottingham.

• **The Superior General, with the advice of his Council, approved the appointment of Fr. John Chan Kunu as Master of Scholastics at the formation house of Sampran.**

## •\• Betharram in heaven •/\•

Father Carlo LUZZI scj

*Talamona (Italy), 12 November 1934*

*- Chiang Mai (Thailand), 17 February 2024*

Silence – A Tribute to Fr Carlo Luzzi

There is a silence sought after, willed, and desired just like the silence of those who choose a hermitic life. But there is also a silence forced and imposed.

Fr Carlo Luzzi was struck by an irreversible Alzheimer's ailment. While he was with us (Fr Pensa and Fr Donini, Italian) for a while, he managed to communicate with us by speaking about the times gone by; but little by little we too became strangers. The gaze became more and more 'fixed' and total silence took the upper hand.



Who was Fr Carlo then? A shy and at the same time courageous young man born on 12 November, 1934 in Talamona (A village in North Italy). He was ordained as priest in June 1958 in Milan while he was 23 years old and seven months.

He left for Thailand (then known as Siam) by ship and arrived in Chiang

Mai in the first month of 1959. After spending some time in learning the Thai language, he went on to serve as assistant (coadjutor) to Fr Trezzi in Phan. Other than the city of Bangkok, Thailand was then just a developing country. It used to take 24 hours of train travel to cover the approximate distance of 700 km between Bangkok and Chiang Mai. After that, one had to take a certain type of truck like vehicle to arrive at the main road from where one can reach the villages provided one had good slippers and muscles.

In 1961, Fr Carlo succeeded Fr Trezzi as the head of the Phan mission. The legacy received from the fathers of the MEP (Foreign Missions of Paris) was a Saint Mary's school (Sirimart thevi). As it was not easy to open a school in Thailand, it was really a good gift; it was a gift except that the wooden construction was dilapidated and needed serious renovation.

Once Fr Carlo had recounted to us as follows: "One year, a classroom was unsafe because the ceiling was eaten by the termites and the woodworms and was out of order. I informed it to the district education director who was impatient because there were many students and he did not know where to let them study. He insisted that I keep the school open knowing that I was about to begin the construction of a new classroom. However, I could not accept it because if an accident happened, who would be responsible? A few days later he returned with a smile and said, "I have found a solution," he told me, "You have three classrooms but one is unusable. You told me that you are about to start building a

new classroom. In that case, I suggest you a solution. Keep the records separate for three classrooms, but accommodate the kids into the two functioning classrooms. It will be bit congested for the children, but they will be able to attend school at least. Children's education is more important than all the bureaucratic issues. I will take responsibility." As a result, there were fifty students per classroom in that particular year."

In his 13 years of service in Phan, Fr Carlo rebuilt all the classrooms in a separate school building on the hill. Moreover, taking advantage of the presence of the Cogefar company which was building the road from Chiang Rai to Ngao (146 km), along with the support of Italian workers, he was able to renovate the church and to replace the old wooden house with a concrete one. While Fr Carlo wore the cap of a builder, the Italians were also very happy to find someone who spoke Italian and to find a nice plate of spaghetti prepared by the nuns.

When Fr Arialdo Urbani was transferred to Chiang Mai as the superior in 1974, Fr Carlo took the responsibility of the new school, Santi Vithaya School (School of Peace) in Chiang Rai which was built by Fr Urbani. Here too, Fr Carlo had the opportunity to develop his skill as a builder while continuing the work of Fr Urbani. In fact, he built the nursery school, the hostel for the children of the hill tribes, and the church to replace the earlier wooden one. In this mission, he was assisted by the 'Sisters of Maria Bambina.' These are his works which are there for all to see and is impossible to miss them.



Nonetheless, there is a silent and unquantifiable work that is his apostolate with the growing number of Christians there. He utilized the opportunity to visit some villages in the mountains as well as the camp of refugees who came from Laos after the communists had taken over the power there in 1975. Meanwhile he also ensured the holy mass for the people once in a month in Chiang Kham where Fr Urbani had built a church in 1972.

Time passes quickly. Fr Carlo also had to shoulder the responsibility as superior from 1980 to 1983. Feuilles Missionnaires reports that "Fr Luzzi, the new superior has to make frequent stays at the Betharram house in Chiang Mai, but he cannot abandon his important work in Chiang Rai too, because there is no one available to replace him. He has found a solution: while his advisors, Fathers Bonnat, Salla and Pensa, take turns guaranteeing the stability at the Missionary Center, he can continue to watch over his parish in Chiang Rai" (FM 102, October 1980).

Even the solutions that seem perfect have an end. In 1989, the Chiang Rai mission was entrusted to the Thai clergy. As a result, Fr Carlo stayed in Chiang Mai where he was able to work as a builder. Meanwhile, the major superiors had decided to open the doors to local vocations and it was necessary to find a suitable environment to receive the novices who were knocking on our doors. We had to hurry it because the first group of novices began to arrive. In the process, Fr Bonnat who was superior since 1990, was also appointed as the Novice Master; he entered the new house with his novices

in 1991.

Later, Fr Carlo renovated the chapel of the Chiang Mai community too. As the days pass by, other fathers succeeded the responsibility of the mission in Chiang Kham and consequently Fr Carlo was free and became a permanent resident in Chiang Mai; Ban Betharram therefore became his home.

A house is such that it can be defined as home when it has a soul; someone who lives in it, looks after it and keeps it alive. Here was precisely the period of silence, not sought, but accepted with a good heart. A period that was not very showy but perhaps the most fruitful mission of Fr Carlo in Thailand: it ensured a constant, regular, lasting, and humble presence.

There are those who recently narrated me that whenever they went to Chiang Mai, Fr Carlo used to welcome them at the entrance of the house itself. Any time the diocesan priests or Betharramites, religious from other Congregations or lay people came to unload some of their burdens or to take a weight off their shoulders or to seek an advice, Fr Carlo was always available. He had a generous heart, an enviable gift, a naivety that did not always allow him to recognize who deserved his compassion.

Then came the silence... a silence forced and imposed by the sickness. Due to the respiratory problems, on 11th February 2024, he was brought to the hospital where he breathed his last at the dawn of 17th February. Of the 89 years and three months of his precious life, Fr Carlo lived 66 years profoundly in Thailand. ■ *Fr. Alberto Pensa scj.*



## The Congregation expelled from France (Part 1/2)

| Roberto Cornara, archivist

### 1. The context of the expulsion

The expulsion of the Betharramites from France represents one of the crucial moments in the history of the Congregation, which found itself compelled by events to abandon its birthplace, its mother house, and the places dear to the memory of the Founder, in order to flee abroad. However, it was precisely this event that gave the Institution new impetus and vitality. Father Estrate, Superior of Bethlehem, wrote on this subject: *"Would we ever have thought of Italy and England without the persecution? God has therefore driven us out to scatter us a little in every country. In time, and it will come quickly, we will recruit vocations in these various countries."*

But why was the Congregation expelled from France? It is difficult for us today to understand the historical and cultural context that led the French government, in the early twentieth century, to make this drastic choice. It can be summed up in one word: anticlericalism. This phenomenon is typical of the Latin countries of Europe and America, that is to say, countries where the Catholic Christian religion was the most widespread religion and

where, consequently, the influence of the Catholic Church had been greater in all levels of social, political, and religious life.

Thanks to the French Revolution, in the nineteenth century, the principles of freedom and equality that are at the origin of the modern State were affirmed in the civil societies of all countries. At the same time, in reaction to the great influence of the Catholic Church in the past, ecclesiastical and religious institutions were seen as a danger against which it was necessary to defend oneself and against which it was necessary to defend civil society. Paradoxically, while on the one hand the freedom of the modern State was affirmed, on the other hand this same freedom was, to a certain extent and in different ways from one country to another, denied to the Catholic Church.

Anticlericalism affected all sections of society and culture, and particularly conditioned and determined political life in many states, to the point of talking about "state anticlericalism." As mentioned earlier, this phenomenon was typical of countries with a large Catholic majority (e.g. Italy, Spain, Portugal, Mexico, etc.); it was almost unknown in Anglo-Saxon countries

and, in some respects, also in those of German language and culture.

In France too, anticlericalism was certainly present, especially after the fall of the government of Napoleon III (1870). However, the policy of Pope Leo XIII had led to a movement of pacification between the French government, "liberal" Catholicism, and the most traditionalist fringes of the Catholic world. In history, this movement is known as the "rallying." But it lasted only a short time, from about 1890 to 1898.

In the legislative elections that followed the "Dreyfus affair," the anticlerical parties prevailed. In June 1899, the government of Pierre Waldeck-Rousseau (1899-1902) was established, who considered the Catholic Church as a state within the state. This situation was intolerable and had to be remedied. His political struggle aimed above all to limit the power of religious congregations, which, according to him, acted without rules, and to subject them to republican law. To this effect, he presented a draft law on associations, which was to regulate the relations between the government and religious congregations (which were put on the same level as any other public association). But if Waldeck-Rousseau had wanted this new law to prevent religious congregations from forming a state within the state, his successor, Émile Combes (1902-1905), upon taking office, transformed the law into an instrument to destroy

"congregationalist" education, and then the congregations themselves.

The "law on associations" was adopted on 1 July 1901. This law put public associations and religious congregations on the same footing. While the law was more liberal for public associations than previous ones, it was not the same for religious institutions. Indeed, the law provided that:

- each congregation, to be able to act freely on French territory, had to obtain authorization from the government;
- unauthorized congregations were declared illegal and their members liable to criminal prosecution;
- unrecognized congregations were dissolved, their property confiscated, and their members had to leave their residence.

During the session of 18 March 1903, the French parliament, at once, refused authorization to 25 religious congregations, qualified by Combes as "teaching" organizations. Among them, Bétharram. On 24 March, 28 "preaching" congregations, 81 female teaching congregations, and on 26 March the Carthusians, qualified as a "commercial" congregation, accused of encouraging "alcoholism in the population," all suffered the same fate. To anyone who pointed out to him that he would thus destroy religious congregations and free education, Combes replied: "*I have taken power expressly for that.*" ■

# Help me know my vocation

Lord, what are you calling me to do?  
what do you want from me?

- \* Make me always achieve better  
my daily work
- \* Give me a simple love for  
the people and things that I ought to love.
- \* I want to imitate Jesus the Christ as best I can.
- \* I want to pray with deep humility  
with total confidence,  
and never tire of it.
- \* Give me the intelligence necessary to think well.
- \* Give me the courage to open up to whoever I need to.
- \* Give me the strength to obey without delay  
without reservation,  
without looking back,  
more out of love than for any other reason.

## Have a good journey towards Easter!

Prayer No. 33 (DS 281-282) taken from *En avant!*, a collection of prayers composed by the  
P. Beñat Oyhénart scj based on the writings of Saint Michael Garicoïts |  
Photo: Fr. Philippe Hourcade scj



Societas S<sup>mi</sup> Cordis Jesu  
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